

January 13, 2006- SOUTHERN WEST VIRGINIA: THRIVING THROUGH TECHNOLOGY

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My vision for southern West Virginia is a clear one. I want West Virginia to be the premiere location in the United States to live, work and play. We have to look no further than our own back yards to see what others are just now realizing, what we have always happily known: living in West Virginia is truly almost heaven.

2006 has already been a difficult year for West Virginia. The Sago Mine tragedy has shed a bright light on the dangerous practice of mining and I am working hard to highlight to my colleagues in Congress the need for increased and continued vigilance on mine safety issues. The issue of mine safety will almost certainly come up in Congressional forums, and I will be diligent, as I have been throughout my tenure in Congress, in making sure the health and safety needs of West Virginia coal miners are represented in Washington and elsewhere.

As we continue to work for the increased safety of our brave coal miners, looking ahead to 2006 we see great promise for our great State.

To accomplish my vision, advances in what I call the "three T's" - Transportation, Technology and Tourism - are paramount. Focusing our efforts on the "three T's" has produced results and I believe my vision can be further accomplished by continuing to enhance our communities through a combination of hard work and leadership from state and local leaders and continued investments from the federal government.

In the transportation arena, we will continue with my vision of developing a safe, modern and efficient transportation infrastructure through continuing work on numerous and important highway projects in southern West Virginia. And our tourism industry will get a boost through new investment in the Beckley Exhibition Coal Mine, an expanded Hatfield-McCoy Trail, and a new Welcome and Interpretive Center in the Greenbrier Valley, just to name a few.

In the coming year, I also see a great deal of opportunity for southern West Virginia in the area of technology. There are many ongoing initiatives which I believe will begin to bear fruit in 2006 and help to provide our citizens with the tools they need to thrive in this fast-paced economy.

One of the most promising is the establishment and development of the Connected Technologies Corridors Program (CTC), a collaborative effort of local economic development groups in southeastern West Virginia. These combined entities are working together under the umbrella of CTC to promote broadband deployment to individuals and businesses and assist with the attraction, retention and expansion of technology companies in our area, and help create a regional market niche for southeastern WV. The CTC will work with local development leaders to coordinate job creation efforts on the I-64 Technology Corridor from Beckley to Lewisburg, the I-77 Tech Corridor from Beckley to Bluefield, as well as

Corridor G from Beckley to Summersville.

Recently, I met with Dr. Joanne Tomblin at Southern West Virginia Community and Technical College to discuss the construction of the new Allied Health and Technology Center in Logan. This new facility will enhance the good work already being done at Southern in the fields of nursing, radiologic technology, medical laboratory technology, paramedic science, dental hygiene and electrocardiography.

I commend the leadership of SWVCTC for their vision in helping to educate our healthcare workforce and in their determination to build this new center. It will play an important role in the Southern Highlands Initiative, a regional economic development partnership which is being jointly coordinated by the Rahall Transportation Institute and Southern West Virginia Community and Technical College to help stimulate economic development through comprehensive regional planning and coordination of transportation and infrastructure investments for the counties of Boone, Lincoln, Logan, McDowell, Mingo and Wyoming.

The Rahall Transportation Institute at Marshall University is furthering their mission of "building jobs through transportation" through increased efforts in technology transfer and assisting new transportation-focused companies to get up and running.

A spirit of optimism is flowing through the Mountain State as we begin the New Year and it is this hope and faith which I share with my fellow West Virginians that great things await us. As 2006 gets underway, I look forward to continuing my service to southern West Virginia and to each of you as your Representative in Washington.